

Transfusion of Blood Products in Children

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This factsheet provides information about blood and platelet transfusions.

Why are blood transfusions given?

Many children with a variety of illnesses will develop a lowering of red blood cells (haemoglobin or Hb) at some time during their illness. This can be due to either the disease or its treatment such as cancer treatment.

Your child's Hb level should be above 80. If it drops to 80 or below they may need a blood transfusion.

Your child may be pale, lethargic, breathless and may complain of aching/painful limbs (mainly legs). A blood transfusion will help to relieve these symptoms. You should notice a benefit within 24 hours.

What happens during a blood transfusion?

Before a blood transfusion is given a blood test, called a Group and Save, is taken to ensure that the donor blood is a suitable match for your child.

The blood will be given as an infusion. If your child has a Hickman line, the blood transfusion will be connected to this through a drip. If your child does not have a Hickman line, a cannula will be inserted and the drip will be connected to it.

The amount of blood given depends on the weight of your child. Each unit (bag) of blood will take approximately three to four hours to be infused. This is to reduce the workload on the heart from the extra blood being given.

Side effects

Severe side effects from the blood transfusion are rare because of strict testing of both the donor and patient's blood. Common side effects include a rise in temperature and/or pulse, headaches, rash, itching and lower back pain. Should your child complain of any of these symptoms please let your nurse know. All are easily treatable and your child's temperature and pulse will be monitored regularly.

What about risk of infection?

Every donation of blood is individually tested, any blood which fails the test is discarded. Testing is regularly monitored to ensure the highest standards are maintained.

The tests look for infection known to be carried by blood, most importantly Hepatitis B and C and the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) that carries the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). The risk of contracting these viruses has become very small. The chance of contracting AIDS from a blood transfusion in the UK is less than 1 in 2 million. Every precaution is taken to ensure the risk of contracting any blood borne disease is minimal.

Platelet transfusions

Your child's disease and/or treatment may also cause their platelets to drop. Platelets are particles in the blood which help clot the blood and prevent bleeding. If your child's platelets are low you may notice that they are bruising easily or bleeding heavily from minor cuts. They may also develop an unusual rash.

Each child's normal platelet count is different. Your doctor will inform you of what your child's acceptable level is.

The number of platelets given will depend on your child's weight. Platelets can be infused over a shorter time than blood, approximately 30 minutes. Some children may have a mild reaction to platelets, such as a high temperature, itching or rash. Should your child display any of these symptoms please tell your nurse immediately. This is easily resolved with the appropriate medication.

General information

You will be asked for written or verbal consent before we give your child any blood products, so if you have any questions please ask the doctor before your sign the form.

Your child's Hb/platelets will be rechecked roughly 48 hours after their blood transfusion.

Your Feedback

We want your visit to be as comfortable as possible - talk to the person in charge if you have any concerns. If the ward/department staff are unable to resolve it, then ask for our Patient Advice and Liaison (PALS) information. Please be assured that raising a concern will not impact on your care.

Before leaving please complete a Friends and Family Test feedback card.

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We work positively with others to achieve shared aims

Accountability

We act with professionalism and integrity, delivering what we commit to, embedding learning when things do not go to plan

Respect

We are anti-discriminatory, treating people fairly and creating a sense of belonging and pride

Empowerment

We speak out when things don't feel right, we are innovative and make changes to support continuous improvement

Support

We are compassionate, listen attentively and are kind to ourselves and each other



The hospital can arrange for an interpreter or person to sign to assist you in communicating effectively with staff during your stay. Please let us know.

For a large print version of this leaflet, contact PALS 01493 453240